

# A TAIL OF TWO VISITORS

By Bob Mills

Several weeks ago while waiting for folks to gather for the Kelso Dunes nature walk, I noticed a visitor in the parking lot with his dog running around off leash. I politely informed him that all dogs had to be on a leash and under the owner's control at all times. He responded that he was busy with an important phone call and that the dog wasn't bothering anyone.

I was a little more forceful with my next comment. "Sir, the rules are that pets must be on a leash inside national park sites. These rules are to protect your dog, other visitors, and their pets. Please help us by following the rules." He irritably replied, "Please stop bothering me; my pet is fine off leash."

My final attempt was: "Sir, I am really hoping you will comply with the rules without me calling law enforcement, but I must ask you to control your dog." The visitor angrily picked up his dog and muttered, "Why can't people just leave pet owners alone?" A few minutes later he was driving down the road with his dog beside him.

Within the past month, I had two very different visitor contacts at Kelso Depot related to pets. The first visitors, camping at a roadside site, let their dog out of their RV without a leash, and it wandered over to another campsite. The dogs at the other site weren't leashed either, and a dog fight ensued, ending with a severely wounded animal. The visitors came to the Depot to find out the location of the nearest animal hospital, which was in Las Vegas - almost two hours away. They rushed off with their injured pet.

The second incident involved a visitor who had spent the last 24 hours frantically looking for his two dogs. He was hoping we had heard some news about them. He had simply let his two dogs out of his RV in the early morning and then gone back to bed, assuming they would stay close like they always did. Later that morning he was unable to locate his dogs and walked and drove for miles looking for them. Eventually, he had to leave and we filled out a report in case anyone

saw the animals. He was in obvious distress as he described his dogs. He showed me pictures of them, and said that he had raised them from pups. He walked slowly toward his car to leave, alone.

Some people might think that the first of these incidents was the least positive from a ranger perspective. But like so many things, every incident depends upon the lens that you view it through. You see, the first visitor left the park with his dog sitting safely beside him. While he didn't like the leash rule, by putting his dog in the car and having it under his control, he kept it out of harm's way. The other dogs were not so lucky.

PLEASE, PLEASE keep your pets on a leash. It's a park regulation, and it protects your pet from injury and loss. We want both you and your pet to have a safe and enjoyable visit at Mojave National Preserve.